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Loved and Loving: John's Letters

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Come visit us at our Web site: <http://www.absg.adventist.org>

Printing and Circulation Office: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193

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The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, the members of which serve as consulting editors. The published Bible study guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s). The Easy Reading Edition is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide in cooperation with Adventist Deaf Ministries, P.O. Box 6114, Mesa, AZ 85216; <http://www.deafadventist.org>.

Introduction

“What We Don’t Know About . . .”

In 2007, a science magazine (*Wired*) had an article whose title was “What We Don’t Know About . . .” The article then ran short stories about such unanswered questions as Why Do We Sleep? Does Time Fool Us? What Is at the Earth’s Center? What Is the Universe¹ Made of? and Why Can We Not Foretell the Weather?

Even after hundreds of years of scientific progress, we still do not know many things!

Fortunately, most basic questions—How did we get here? Why are we here? and Where are we going?—are not left unanswered. Instead God has shown to us in the Bible the answers to these important questions. And among those answers given to us in the Bible, we have the writings of John the evangelist.²

This quarter we will not study John’s Gospel (his own inspired eyewitness [firsthand] account of Jesus) or the book of Revelation (which John also wrote). Instead we are going to study John’s three letters. These letters were addressed to certain churches and people in John’s time. But they deal with issues that speak to us today. These issues are false doctrines (beliefs), sin, love, apostasy (backsliding), and obedience. But most important of all, they deal with Jesus Christ, the One through whom we were created (How did we get here?). Jesus is the One who gives our life meaning and purpose (Why are we here?). Jesus is also the One who promises to come again and raise us to eternal³ life (Where are we going?). In short, in Jesus we find the answers to life’s most important questions.

As with many of the letters of the New Testament, John’s letters were written to deal with issues facing some of the churches at that time. One such issue is the nature of Christ.⁴ This topic influenced⁵ the Christian’s view of truth. According to John, if a person denies the fact that Jesus Christ “has come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2, NIV), he or she would not be following the Bible’s teaching. In turn it would lead to a different way of how a group of believers works together and works with the world. Then not believing that Christ came in the flesh would lead to backsliding and ruin. So this theme (topic, idea) of John’s letters is very important.

Indeed while studying verses and themes of these letters, we need to keep

1. universe—all the matter (things), light, and energy (forces in nature that do work) that have been discovered (found) or that we know of.

2. evangelist—preacher who travels, preaching the gospel (good news about Jesus).

3. eternal—forever; without end.

4. nature of Christ—any of the qualities or aspects of God that make Him who He is, such as His love, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, holiness, power, and so on.

5. influenced—to have power or an effect over persons or things.

in mind that they are all related to Jesus. Each time we discuss them, we also discuss who Jesus is, what He has done for us, and what He promises to do for us.

The three letters of John are written about issues that relate to the church today. We would do well to follow them because we believe that God is teaching us through John's words. God is the One who has made known to us the truths about a greater and firmer (stronger) foundation: our Creator and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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6. hermeneutics—a method or principle (rule) of interpretation (an explanation that makes something known or easy to understand).

7. applied theology—using general (basic; common) principles (rules) to solve definite problems or questions in theology (study of God).